



Success Snapshot for Media

City of Madison Creates Successful Program to Guide Home and Business Owners Through the Process of Installing Solar Energy Systems

Municipalities across the country offer a wide range of services to their citizens from trash removal to urban planning. To accelerate the adoption of solar energy, municipalities can also provide assistance to citizens contemplating the purchase and installation of a solar energy system for a home or business. Through its partnership with the U.S. Department of Energy's Solar America Cities program, Madison, Wis., has created a consumer assistance program to aid in building a sustainable local solar market.

In June 2008, through a Solar America Cities grant, the City of Madison created a solar agent program to assist residents and business owners in the decision-making process when contemplating the purchase of solar energy systems and to educate them on the necessary steps to adopt solar energy. A goal of this program is to increase consumer confidence in solar energy technologies. The program offers a free comprehensive set of services, such as basic solar education, site surveys to determine if solar is a viable option, financial analysis, permitting and information on state and federal financial incentives for solar energy installations.

A qualified independent consultant who works for the city of Madison provides the solar services. This lends credibility to the program, creates trust within the Madison community and allows the consultant direct access to all city departments associated with the required permitting procedures.

The solar agent performs remote site surveys using aerial photography and GIS mapping, discusses installation cost figures and arranges on-site assessment for each property found suitable for solar technology installation. This service has proved to be extremely popular among Madison residents, eliciting more than 513 solar inquiries, and resulting in eight commercial and residential installations as of January 2010. Many more installations are expected as customers move through the purchase process over the coming months.

"With a population that falls into the eco-friendly category, demand for Madison's solar agent program continues to be higher than anticipated," said Jeanne Hoffman, facilities and sustainability manager, City of Madison. "The program's popularity has resulted in an increase in the solar agent's hours, as well as changes to the program implementation to include two levels of service that will be divided between two agents. One agent will be responsible for tasks such as handling incoming inquiries, prescreening evaluations and educating the public about solar energy. The second agent will be responsible for conducting site visits, providing energy analysis and assisting customers with the solar purchasing process. These changes will continue to provide the residents of Madison with complimentary, efficient access to services that will help them more easily adopt solar systems."



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The City of Madison has been at the forefront of addressing the need for solar education and solar site assessment programs like the solar agent program. Other Solar America Cities that have implemented successful consumer assistance programs include Berkeley and San Francisco, Calif. In addition, the City of Santa Rosa is implementing a new Clean Energy Advocate project within Santa Rosa and Sonoma County, thanks to a Solar America Cities special project grant from The Department of Energy. The Clean Energy Advocate project is based on Madison's program and is designed to provide an independent, non-commercial advocate to help property owners purchase and install solar.

For more information on the work done in Madison, Wis., the other cities referenced above or best practices in solar consumer assistance programs, please contact Jim Licko, GroundFloor Media, and he can connect you with the following individuals for interviews:

- Hannah Muller or Charlie Hemmeline, U.S. Department of Energy, Solar America Cities
- Jeanne Hoffman, facilities and sustainability manager, City of Madison
- Larry Walker, solar agent, representing the City of Madison

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